

Opening Statement of Ranking Member Tom McClintock
Oversight Hearing:
Healthy Oceans and Healthy Economies: The State of Our Oceans in the 21st
Century
Water, Oceans and Wildlife Subcommittee
February 7, 2019, 2:00 pm, 1324 Longworth House Office Building

Abraham Lincoln told the story of once boarding with the family of a Presbyterian minister on the night of the greatest meteor shower ever recorded in North America. He was awakened by the minister who shouted, “Arise Abraham, for the heavens are falling and the day of judgment has arrived.” But Lincoln noticed that despite the hysteria around him and the chaos above him, that he could still see the familiar constellations fixed in the sky, and he knew the world was not about to end.

No one denies that our planet is warming; carbon dioxide levels are increasing, and ocean levels are rising. But before we run screaming into the night, let’s also do a quick reality check. The sky isn’t falling.

Warming is nothing new: our planet has been warming on and off since the last ice age. There have been periods within both recorded history and throughout paleo history when scientists tell us temperatures were much higher than they are today. Science tells us that carbon dioxide levels have varied widely throughout the planet’s history, when they have been many times higher than today. Science tells us that at the end of the last ice age, ocean levels were 400 feet LOWER than they are today, and as we will hear, the current rise has been steady, small, and doesn’t correlate to increases in carbon dioxide levels. Hurricane activity is much lower than recorded in the 18th Century.

And despite what we are told, there is a vigorous debate within the scientific community over how human activity compares with vastly more powerful natural influencers that have driven climate change for 4 ½ billion years. As chicken little belatedly discovered, there is a big difference between an acorn and the sky.

We welcome a civil and open debate on these issues, and for that reason are pleased to have with us Professor David Legates of the University of Delaware, a pre-eminent climatologist who has served as its Director of the Center for Climatic Research and as Delaware State Climatologist.

Science thrives on civil and dispassionate debate. When someone tells you the debate is over, that dissent should be forbidden and dissenters should be personally attacked – that’s not a scientist talking – that’s a politician.

We also need to consider the enormous costs that the left would impose on each of our families in pursuit of its “Green New Deal.” We already have a taste of these policies in California, where carbon taxes have produced among the highest electricity and gasoline prices in the United States. We are also pleased to have on the panel Dr. Kevin Dayaratna, to discuss these issues. He is Senior Statistician at the Heritage Foundation’s Center for Data Analysis and holds a Ph.D. in mathematical statistics and two masters’ degrees in business and management and mathematical statistics.

This discussion also offers us the opportunity to find common ground. There are many ways to reduce carbon dioxide emissions without destroying the lives of working families and producing the kind of reaction we now see on the streets of Paris. We have discussed these opportunities at great length over the last eight years.

For example, if we need to generate power without carbon, doesn’t it make sense to build new nuclear power plants and hydro-electric dams that produce electricity at far lower costs and with far smaller footprints than wind and solar?

If temperatures are rising and we can store less winter moisture in the mountains as snow, doesn’t it make sense to build more reservoirs to save that water rather than lose it to the ocean?

If oceans are rising, doesn’t it make sense to phase out flood insurance subsidies that encourage people to build in flood plains by hiding their risk?

Last year’s wildfires pumped 290 million metric tons of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere, making a mockery of carbon dioxide restrictions. Doesn’t it make sense to harvest excess timber before it can choke off the forest and burn? Doesn’t it make sense to manage our forests to match the tree density to the ability of the land to support it? Doesn’t it make sense to space trees so that snow isn’t trapped in dense canopies to evaporate before it can reach the ground?

These are desirable policies in their own right and they serve the Democrats’ desire to reduce carbon emissions. I offer them as a way forward that should have bi-partisan support.